

BUCK JONES . . .

By BUCK WILSON

and the Platteville Bank Robbery

BUCK JONES rode down toward the little frontier town of Platteville at dawn. Going north to buy new stock for the Flying-P, he had ridden all night to escape the best of the day. He planned to rest himself and his mount in town this morning and then push on to the Circle-R, still sixty miles away.

"Silver," Buck said to his horse as they came into the single, deserted street of Platteville, "we'll rouse up that luxurious hotel and get something to eat."

He drew up and dismounted before the unpainted, warped building that served Platteville as a hotel. Glancing down the empty street, he saw a man lead four horses from behind a dilapidated structure bearing the sign PLATTEVILLE RANCHERS BANK.

"Huh!" he muttered. "Wonder what he's doing at this time in the morning?"

As the words passed through his mind, a shot sounded from the bank and three men, carrying sacks, rushed forth. They leaped on the waiting horses.

"Red Canyon!" said one of them hoarsely.



"I Want a Posse!"

An instant later they were pounding down the street.

"Holy smoke!" exclaimed Buck. "Come on, Silver, we've got to trail them!"

Buck leaped into the saddle, and the white horse sprang forward. As he raced past the bank, Buck saw a man's body sprawled inside the doorway.

"Plugged the watchman!" he growled.
CRACK! CRACK! CRACK!

Buck's sombrero suddenly leaped from his head.

"Not so fast, you murderin' polecat!" shouted an angry voice.

Buck drew Silver up short and whirled around. A man holding a smoking gun, and with a star on his shirt, bad him covered. Townsmen were pouring into the street and burrying up to them.

"Get your horses!" shouted Buck to the crowd. "The cash thieves are heading for Red Canyon!"

"Get down off that horse!" barked the sheriff. "Keep your hands up. You're charged with th' murder o' Hank Wiggin's!"

Buck dismounted and a bystander took



Buck Dismounted Before the Hold

his guns away from him.

"There go yore bank-busters!" protested Buck, pointing to the receding dust cloud beyond town.

"We're goin'," grumbled the sheriff, "an' we don't need any o' yore lip. I want a posse," he said to the excited circle around them. "Get yore horses, quick!"

"We'll give yuh a necktie party when we get back," growled a bystander, looking darkly at Buck.

"If your sheriff spends his time shooting holes in honest hombres' hats, he'll never catch thos' sneak thieves!" retorted Buck.

"Shut up!" shouted the sheriff, climbing onto a horse which a deputy led up. "Jeff," he ordered, "put this killer in the calaboose. We'll take care o' him when we got th' others. Come on! Bet they're headed for Long Gulch, 'cause their pardner here said they was goin' to Red Canyon."

The sheriff, followed by a dozen men, clattered away in a cloud of dust. The remainder of the crowd, with sour looks at Buck, began to disperse.

"The doggone fool!" groaned Buck. "He'll never catch them!"

"You was purty slow on the getaway," snarled Jeff. "Don't try no tricks now, stranger. Move!"



The Duke Clanged Shut Behind Buck

Jeff recovered Buck's guns from the man who had disarmed him. Then he steered Buck toward the jail. As they neared it, Buck spoke up.

"Say, pardner, will you look to my hoss? This isn't his fault, and he's had hard riding."

"Yep," said Jeff. "No scuse in a hombre like you ownin' a hoss like that!"

Buck smiled faintly.

Two minutes later the barred door clanged shut behind Buck. Jeff left to take care of Silver.

Buck sat down on the cot in his cell.

"The sand-eating lizards," he muttered, "think I did it! And now they're chasing off in the wrong direction!"

He leaned back and laughed till he was weak. Then he became more serious.

"What a spot! Don't know anybody in this cussed town. Until those hold-up artists are behind the bars, Buck Jones will take the blame—and maybe be honor man in a necktie party. The fool sheriff's got to get some hombre to save his measly job. I've got to get out of here and—"

Footfalls sounded in the corridor. Jeff appeared, slapping sand from his clothes. He sat on a stool outside Buck's cell.

"Repentin'?" he asked.

"Never did anything wrong in my life,"



They Clattered Away

grinned Buck, "but I'm sure burned up about being in here!"

"Talkin' like that'll do yuh no good," drawled Jeff. "But say, pard, about that hoss of yores. Yuh ain't gonna be needin' 'im for a long time, I'm thinkin'. Whaddaya want fer 'im?"

"If I don't need Silver," snapped Buck, "I don't need money. You couldn't have a hair of Silver for a million pesos!"

Jeff gazed interestedly at his prisoner.

"Yuh talk like a white man," he exclaimed. "How'd yuh ever get in with them snakes?"

Buck shook his head impatiently.

"Guess it's no use talking," he muttered. "You wouldn't believe me."

Jeff rolled and lit a cigarette. After two or three puffs he glanced at Buck.

"Wonder when them sand fleas'll get back. Hope I ain't gonna sit here all day."

Buck took off his sombrero and eyed the bullet holes ruefully. Jeff sighed with boredom.

"Play poker, stranger?" asked Jeff.

"I don't take any houndre's dollars," smiled Buck, "but I'll take your shirt."

Eagerly accepting the challenge, Jeff produced a battered deck of cards. The two men drew their stools up to the bars. Jeff shuffled the cards and dealt Buck five.



"Listen," Said Buck

"They ain't marked or nothin'," Jeff reassured his prisoner.

Buck looked at his hand with feigned amusement.

"Smarter, pard?" inquired Jeff. "Some poker face you got!"

"What in blazes is this?" demanded Buck, holding his cards so that Jeff would have to lean close to the bars to see them.

"I don't see anythin'—" began Jeff.

He leaped back, but he was too late. Buck's hand had darted through the bars and snatched Jeff's gun from its holster.

"Not a word, pardner," whispered Buck, covering him. "Unlock that door!"

Jeff, with uneasy glances at Buck's steady gun hand, sullenly opened the door.

"Yuh won't get far!" he muttered.

"Listen!" said Buck tensely. "I'm going after those murdering coyotes, and I need Silver. You're going to take me to the stable out the back door. My guns will be in the holsters, but remember—I'm the fastest-drawing bombre in the Southwest!"

Buck stepped out of the cell and picked up his cartridge belts and guns. Jeff led him through the back door of the jail and toward the stables.

As he saddled Silver, Buck spoke sharply to Jeff.



He Eyed the Two Bullet Holes

"Hate to do this, pardner, but I'm an innocent man. If you'll give me a minute's start, I won't have to shoot anybody."

Jeff's eyes showed a gleam of admiration.

"Maybe you're straight," he mumbled. "You'll get the minute unless somebody else sees you."

Buck vaulted into the saddle and touched Silver's ribs with his heels. Silver bounded out the door and into the street. As he stretched out into a gallop, Buck heard shouts behind him. Glancing back, he saw men running from the saloon. They fired after him, then leaped on their horses.

Silver's long, beautiful stride quickly left his pursuers behind. A few minutes after he had left the outskirts of the town, Buck saw that the chase had been given up. He slowed Silver to a trot.

"Now, Silver," he murmured grimly, "we've got to watch for the posse and those sneak thieves both. Lucky we know the Red Canyon country, old hoss!"

An hour's ride brought Buck to the arroyo which, gradually deepening, became Red Canyon two miles to the north. He turned down into the arroyo.

"Maybe we can come up on them without being seen, Silver," he said. "But we've



Buck Rode on Slowly

sure got to watch carefully. Those bounches will shoot without asking questions."

Fifteen minutes later Buck rode into the opening of Red Canyon. It was a jumble of sandstone buttes and outcroppings, loose sand and sagebrush.

"Bet they headed for the spring," muttered Buck. "They can water their horses, share the swag, and ride for the broken country up north."

He wiped his streaming face.

"That sheriff," was his afterthought, "will be chasing them somewhere around the Rio Grande by that time!"

Carefully listening, Buck rode on slowly. When he was two hundred yards from the spring, he dismounted.

"Stay here!" he ordered Silver, rubbing the horse's nose.

He began picking his way along the floor of the canyon, keeping next to the wall.

"They might not be at the spring," he reflected. "Probably they're near enough to use it, but far enough away so they won't be seen. But I'm taking no chances!"

When Buck rounded the next corner of the canyon, he saw that his reasoning had been right. Hoofmarks about the spring betrayed the recent presence of four riders.

Buck stealthily followed the canyon



Silver Outdistanced His Pursuers

northward. The sun, now in the south, penetrated down into the canyon and made him gasp with the heat. Suddenly he stopped short, hearing a burst of angry voices.

"Yuh on'y held th' bosses! Yuh ain't tellin' me how t' divide!"

"I coulda got plugged as quick as you!"

"Must be down there in a gully off to my right," Buck whispered to himself. "Maybe I can crawl up on that ledge and get the drop on them."

Buck stepped as near to the ledge as he dared. Then he took to his hands and knees. As the wrangling voices grew louder, he halted to see that the cylinders of his Colt's worked smoothly.

He wriggled to the edge of the ledge and peered down. Four men, mounted and riding close together, were passing only ten feet below him. He instantly recognized them as the bank robbers.

"Reach, you hombres!" he sang out.

Three of the men raised empty hands and stared upward. The fourth, slim and crafty, was slower with his hands, and when they were lifted they held exploding six-shooters.

A bullet spattered rock into Buck's face, and a splinter of lead cut his cheek. Buck saw the other three men go for their guns.



They Stared Upward

But Buck was quicker. Throwing himself from the ledge, he landed like a bombshell in the midst of them. His hurtling body knocked the slim man from his horse and sent another man's gun spinning. Before the other two outlaws could locate a target to shoot at, Buck, behind the riderless horse, had them covered with a very businesslike air.

"Wal, I'll be hornsawoggled!" gasped one of them.

"Drop those guns!" commanded Buck.

They dropped their guns. The slim man, who had been thrown from his horse, got to his feet painfully.

"You've busted my arm!" he snarled at Buck. "What th'—"

Buck lowered his guns for just a second as he glanced at the man's arm. Just then the arm flashed under the outlaw's coat and came out with a blazing derringer.

Buck leaped aside, his own guns blazing. He felt a sickening impact on his left arm. The slim man dropped his derringer and reeled as a .45 bullet shattered his shinbone.

"Now your leg is busted!" gritted Buck. "No more of that, you dirty killers!"

"What's this—a hold-up?" groaned the slim man angrily, leaning on the shoulder of another outlaw.



He Took to His Hands and Knees

Buck glanced at the money bags, slung from the saddles of the horses.

"Mebbe he's a hoss thief," growled a man with a red beard.

"Shut up!" snapped Buck. "You're getting on your horses and riding back to Platteville. Quick!"

His left arm hanging limp, Buck flourished a six-gun at the two standing bandits. They helped the wounded man into his saddle.

The little procession followed the canyon southward, Buck walking behind with a gun swinging in his good right hand. He was sick from the shock of his wound. When they came to Silver, Buck mounted with difficulty, keeping his prisoners covered.

Emerging from the canyon, they began the ride to town, through sand, sagebrush, and cacti. The outlaws grumbled at the burning sun and the glare of the sand. The man with the hurt leg jabbered deliriously. Buck, feeling sicker than ever, brought up the rear.

Three hours of slow riding brought them within sight of Platteville, a little cluster of warped boards on the scorched plain. As Buck and his prisoners neared the town, a group of horsemen appeared outside the town and galloped swiftly to-



Buck Saw the Posse

ward them, raising a great cloud of dust.

Buck, almost blind from weakness and the glare, was barely able to recognize the posse as it drew up in front of him.

"Wal, what th'—!" gasped the sheriff, glancing at the money bag hanging from the saddles.

"Here's yore bank husters," muttered Buck.

Buck reeled in his saddle. Jeff appeared at his side and steadied him. The posse turned on the sheriff angrily.

"Yuh danged fool!" shouted one of them. "Yuh been paradin' us all day chasin' sand clouds, an' yore own pris'ner 'scapes an' beats the whole posse on th' take!"

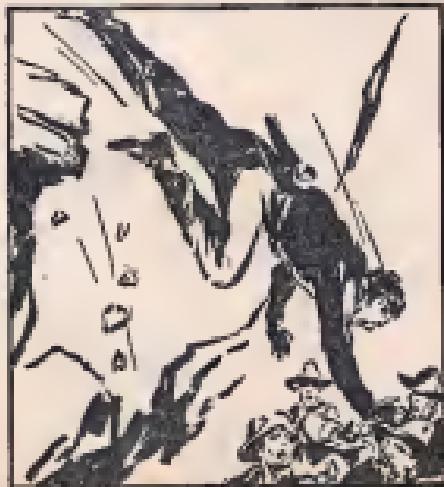
"Cut the yap," put in another deputy. "We got two wounded men here. They gotta see a medico quick."

As the grumbling and disconfited sheriff led the party back toward town, deputies swarmed about Buck and deluged him with questions.

"Leave 'im alone!" said Jeff angrily. "Let's see that arm, pardner."

"Just got a flesh wound," grinned Buck. "Be on my way again tomorrow."

"Say," said Jeff, "what's yore monicker?—if yuh don't mind the askin'. Yuh shore got what it takes!"



Buck Threw Himself From the Ledge